



## The Subcommittee on Human Rights and Wellness

Chairman Dan Burton (R ~ IN)

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### **“INTERNATIONAL CHILD ABDUCTION: THE ABSENCE OF RIGHTS FOR AMERICAN CITIZENS IN SAUDI ARABIA”**

#### **- OUT OF ARABIA, SARAH SAGA TO TELL HER STORY -**

Washington, D.C. – After being held against her will in Saudi Arabia for the last 18 years, Sarah Saga was finally reunited with her mother, Deborah Dornier, on Tuesday, June 24, 2003. The reunion was bittersweet though for Ms. Saga, who in exchange for her freedom had to leave behind her two children, son Ibrahim age 5, and daughter Hanin age 3, in the custody of their Saudi-national father. Ms. Saga and Ms. Dornier will get the chance to tell their remarkable stories when they testify before Congress this week.

Congressman Dan Burton (R-IN), Chairman of the House Government Reform Subcommittee on Human Rights and Wellness, will hold a hearing entitled, **“International Child Abduction: The Absence of Rights for American Citizens in Saudi Arabia,” on Wednesday, July 9, 2003, in Room 2154 of the Rayburn House Office Building at 2:00 p.m.**

Said Burton, “What happened to Sarah Saga is an absolute tragedy. When I went to Saudi Arabia in August 2002, I witnessed first-hand the fear and intimidation these American women and children live under. It is absolutely imperative that the State Department and Congress work together and bring the necessary diplomatic and legal pressure to bear that will guarantee the safe return of these U.S. citizens.”

The Subcommittee will hear testimony from Ms. Sarah Saga, a 24-year-old American citizen who was abducted by her father and taken to Saudi Arabia when she was 6-years-old. Last month, Ms. Saga fled with her children (Ibrahim and Hanin) to the United States consulate in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, where they remained for 10 days while Sarah tried to arrange safe passage back to the U.S. Ms. Saga will talk about her experiences as an American citizen who was kidnapped as a young child and prohibited from returning to America or having any interaction with her mother, as well as her experiences as an adult American woman living in Saudi Arabia against her will with her two children. Ms. Saga will also discuss the steps she took in order to be able to return to the United States, including the assistance that she received from the United States consulate and what-if any-cooperation she received from the Saudi government. Ms. Saga will be accompanied by her mother, Ms. Deborah Dornier, who will provide her perspective as an American mother who struggled to retain the rightful custody of her U.S. citizen daughter.

In addition, Ms. Maura Harty, Assistant Secretary of State – Consular Affairs, will speak about various State Department initiatives to alleviate the problem of international child abduction, specifically within Saudi Arabia. Also, Ms. Manal Radwan, a representative from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, will provide testimony to explain why the Saudi government has not been more helpful in assisting the United States in resolving ongoing custody disputes, and what steps they plan to take to ensure the safe return of American citizens who wish to leave Saudi Arabia. Finally, a representative from the Department of Homeland Security has been invited to discuss the new entry and exit measures that will be observed in the United States, which may be useful in preventing future international child abduction cases.

During his tenure as Chairman of the Full House Committee on Government Reform (1997-2002), Chairman Burton launched an investigation into the matter of American citizens who have been kidnapped, often in violation of U.S. custody orders, and are being held in Saudi Arabia against their will. These American citizens, many of them women and children, have reportedly been denied their rights, as guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution. Many of them have been subjected to emotional, physical, and sexual abuse. Moreover, the young girls who have been abducted will never be allowed to leave Saudi Arabia, at any age, unless they have written permission from their closest male relative, who is often the one who kidnapped them in the first place.

**WITNESSES:**

- Sarah Saga, American citizen abducted to Saudi Arabia in 1984
- Deborah Dornier, Mother of Sarah Saga
- Manal Radwan, Representative of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
- Maura Harty, Assistant Secretary of State, Consular Affairs, U.S. Department of State
- Representative from the U.S. Visit Program, U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
(invited)

For more information on Chairman Burton's legislative and investigative efforts regarding international child abductions, please visit the human rights portion of his website at [www.house.gov/burton/humanrights](http://www.house.gov/burton/humanrights).